First Night presents

H&H

Handel & Haydn Society
Christopher Hogwood, Artistic Director
One Hundred Seventy-seventh Season, 1991-1992

December 31, 1991 at 8:30 and 10 pm
Church of the Advent, Boston

John Finney conducting

Music of William Byrd (1543-1623)

Sing we merrily unto God our strength
Jean Danton, Rachel Hersey, Roberta Anderson, Susan Byers, Martin Kelly

Ne irascaris
Susan Trout, Pamela Dellal, Phillip Kidd, Herman Hildebrand, Jonathan Barnhart

Siderum rector

Mass for Four Voices
Kyrie
Gloria

Fantasia in C Major
James David Christie, organ

Mass for Four Voices
Sanctus
Agnus Dei

Sing ye to our Lord
Roberta Anderson, Gail Abbey, Mark Sprinkle

Iustorum animae

Christ rising again
Jean Danton, Rachel Hersey, solos

WCRB 102.5 FM
CLASSICAL RADIO BOSTON

William Byrd (1543-1623)

William Byrd's long life fell across years of religious strife in England. During Elizabeth's reign, anyone caught practicing Roman Catholicism was subject to a heavy fine, or worse. Byrd was repeatedly fined for recusancy, particularly in the 1580s, the worst period for English Catholics. Yet during this same period, he composed a number of official compositions, including a song composed in 1588 to celebrate the victory of the Spanish Armada — with a text by the queen herself! Evidently his musical genius not only saved him from prison, but kept him in the center of official musical life.

After Byrd's death a note in the Cheque Book of the Chapel Royal called him "a Father of Musick."

William Byrd composed at least a few pieces in virtually every genre practiced in the England of his day. He was largely responsible for the perfection of English virginal music from what had been quite primitive traditions before his day, and he composed varied, expressive, and moving compositions for both the Roman and Anglican church services, not only the motets, but also settings of the Mass and the "Great Service." His secular vocal music includes a large body of English part songs, many of which began life as consort songs, for solo voice with a consort of viols. Later Byrd, bowing to the fashionable fondness for the Italian madrigal, arranged all the instrumental parts with words. He even composed a few original works in the Italian style, although he evidently did not find it congenial to his taste, for he did it only rarely.

Virtually nothing is known about Byrd before he turned 20, when he received his first appointment as Organist at Lincoln Cathedral. In 1570, he joined the Chapel Royal, and spent most of the next twenty years in or near London. In 1575, Elizabeth granted Byrd and Thomas Tallis a patent for the printing of music in England. That year they produced a massive volume of Latin motets, *Cantiones...sacrae,* Byrd's first publication. From this volume comes *Siderum rector,* a hymn setting (in largely homophonic style) with a Doxology in flowing non-imitative counterpoint.

Byrd composed a great deal of wonderful keyboard music, much of it preserved in two manuscript anthologies, the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book and My Ladye Nevells Booke; it is the latter that contains the splendid Fantasia in C.

In 1589 and 1591 Byrd published two more Latin motet anthologies, which could have been used in either the Roman or high Anglican services, though Byrd's choice of texts (including references to the "Babylonian captivity") suggests that he was subtly arguing for religious tolerance. *Ne irascaris,* composed as early as 1581, alternates near homophony and imitative polyphony with wonderful flexibility. A century later, Henry Purcell made a copy of this motet for his own study. *Songes of Sundrie Natures,* also published in 1589, contained both sacred and secular works in English, including *Christ rising,* a superb verse anthem (with long solo or duet passages alternating with sections for the full choir).

In the 1590s Byrd began more openly to produce Catholic music, including his three Mass settings (one each for three, four, and five voices). It was a courageous act to publish such works, even with his high connections. The four-voice Mass is compact, designed for use in modest

musical establishments, avoiding the extended, flowing lines of the earlier Latin works.

In 1605 Byrd produced his *Gradualia*, a large series of short works that could be linked in various ways to provide music for the Catholic service through virtually the entire liturgical year (he was forced to withdraw the work for a time when political reaction to the Gunpowder Plot made even owning a copy grounds for arrest). *Justorum animae* plays on vocal textures with homophonic phrases in alternating voices.

As Byrd approached his 70th year, he began a new flurry of publications, including the 1611 *Psalmes, Songs, and Sonnets*, an anthology of his works in many genres, both sacred and secular. The works from this publication to be sung on the present program all show in varying degrees the influence of the Italian madrigal in little touches of word-painting and consistent imitation, though Byrd's preference for a full texture throughout is an English trait.

After Byrd's death a note in the Cheque Book of the Chapel Royal called him "a Father of Musick." Indeed, he created or consolidated almost single-handedly in England the Renaissance motet with imitative polyphony, the consort song, fantasias, and dance movements for keyboard. In addition, as the teacher of Morley and Tomkins, and probably also of Peter Philips, John Weelkes, and John Bull, he influenced English music far beyond his own lifetime.

—Steven Ledbetter

Steven Ledbetter is musicologist and program annotator for the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Ensemble

Organ
James David Christie

Soprano
Gail Abbey
Roberta Anderson
Jean Danton
Rachel Hersey

Alto
Susan Byers
Pamela Dellal
Susan Trout

Tenor
Martin Kelly
Phillip Kidd
Mark Sprinkle

Bass
Jonathan Barnhart
Herman Hildebrand
Donald Wilkinson

John Finney, *Chorusmaster*

John Finney holds degrees in organ performance from the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music and the Boston Conservatory. He studied at the North German Organ Academy with Harald Vogel and the Academy for Italian Organ Music with Luigi Tagliavini, and with David S. Boe and James David Christie (organ), and Lisa Goode Crawford (harpsichord). Mr. Finney has performed solo recitals throughout the United States and Europe, as well as performing regularly with the Handel & Haydn Society and other groups. He is Director of Music at the Wellesley Hills Congregational Church, conductor of the Heritage Chorale in Framingham, and chorusmaster for the Boston Early Music Festival Chorus.

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Christopher Hogwood, Artistic Director

1991-1992 Chamber Music Series

January 31, 8 p.m.
Haydn at Esterhazy:
Concerto for Organ No. 1 in C Major, Symphony No. 22 "The Philosopher," and Saint Nicholas Mass
Jordan Hall at the New England Conservatory

Franz Joseph Haydn spent 30 productive years at the court of Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy, where he composed the delightful works on this program. The lovely St. Nicholas Mass is set off to advantage by our stellar chorus in the brilliant acoustics of Jordan Hall. A full orchestra of period instruments performs the contemplative Symphony No. 22. Acclaimed organist James David Christie is featured in the Organ Concerto.

March 27, 8 p.m.
Monteverdi and Gesualdo: Madrigals
Old South Church

Gesualdo — composer, nobleman, and murderer — wrote music of fiery imagery and surprising colors that sounds daring even today. Monteverdi is well-loved as one of the most important composers in the history of music. From complex five-voice textures to florid solos and duets, the freshness and clarity of Monteverdi's madrigals make them a joy for performers to sing and for audiences to hear!

May 15, 8 p.m.
Scheidt, Schütz, and Schein: Dance Suites and Madrigals
Old South Church

Before Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, there were Scheidt, Schütz, and Schein — renowned as the three best German composers of the 17th century. In this program you'll hear expressive motets, sparkling secular madrigals, grand polychoral works radiant with Venetian splendor, and delicate vocal concertos. The colorful sounds of viols, cornetti, and sackbuts enhance this excursion into the music of 17th century Germany.

To subscribe to the Chamber Series or to receive a free brochure, visit the H&H Box Office, 300 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston (across from Symphony Hall), Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., or call (617)266-3605.